

Bollywood tracks towards and through the city:

Structural patterns of Hindi film culture in Antwerp (Belgium)

Vandeveld Iris, Meers Philippe, Vande Winkel Roel^a

Van Bauwel Sofie^b

^aDepartment of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium;

^bDepartment of Communication Studies, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium

Vandeveld Iris (corresponding author)

Sint-Jacobstraat 2, M481

2000 Antwerp, Belgium

iris.vandeveld@ua.ac.be

Philippe Meers (PhD)

Sint-Jacobstraat 2, M179

2000 Antwerp, Belgium

philippe.meers@ua.ac.be

Roel Vande Winkel (PhD)

Sint-Jacobstraat 2, M052

2000 Antwerp, Belgium

roel.vandewinkel@ua.ac.be

Sofie Van Bauwel (PhD)

Korte Meer 7-11

9000 Ghent, Belgium

sofie.vanbauwel@ugent.be

Bollywood tracks towards and through the city:

Structural patterns of Hindi film culture in Antwerp (Belgium)

Word count: 7860 The globalisation of Hindi cinema is a topical issue in current media and film research. Whereas the majority of previous studies on Indian film in diaspora have been concerned with issues of audiences and text, this article concentrates on the structural patterns of Hindi film, specifically in the Belgian city of Antwerp. It is inspired by insights from political economy studies which acknowledge the balance of power and global dynamics from a local perspective. Using distribution and exhibition analyses based on interviews, surveys and archival research, this study examines Hindi cinema's tracks towards (selection and distribution) and through (promotion and exhibition) the city, mainly in multiplex theatres. These analyses adopt a historical approach and reconstruct how the exclusive film culture of one community has been transformed into a more elaborate commercial enterprise, revealing both continuity and change in power relations, public, urban and transnational spaces as well as audience management. This study demonstrates the dependency of a diasporic film culture on the greater context of global cinema history, and the way in which peripheral marketplaces such as Antwerp are becoming increasingly subject to transnational corporations and their strategies.

Keywords: Hindi cinema; political economy; structural analysis; diaspora; film distribution and exhibition

Introduction

'Destination for July? India and China! [...] Have you watched *Slumdog Millionaire* and fallen in love with Indian culture? No problem: in July you can discover two Bollywood blockbusters, full of colour, romance and music' (Kinopolis Group 2009a, authors' translation). Thus ran the online advertisements carried by Metropolis, the Antwerp branch of Belgian multiplex exhibition group and market leader Kinopolis¹, when the summer of 2009 saw the release of two new Hindi films in Antwerp. This is an instance of the globalisation of 'Bollywood' – as the commercial Hindi film industry based in Bombay/Mumbai has popularly become known – that has taken place in recent years

and that has been reflected clearly in the fact that revenues earned from non-Indian markets now amount to approximately one third of the total profits (Kapur and Pendakur 2007, 50; see also Banaji 2006; Desai 2004; Kavoori and Punathambekar 2008). In Antwerp Bollywood has become the most visibly present diasporic cinema despite the fact that the local Indian population of approximately 3400 is smaller than other migrant communities, such as the Moroccan and Turkish ones for example (approximately 57,900 and 19,500 respectively).² The appeal of Indian cinema appears not to be limited to Antwerp Indians but extends to other South Asian groups, the Moroccan and Turkish communities as well as 'native' Belgians, though all under specific preconditions.

This article analyses structures of distribution and exhibition of diasporic Hindi film cultures, unravelling historical transformations and their reverberations in issues of power, ownership and control, as well as spatial presence and audience management. We examine these topics through a case study of Bollywood films' transnational trajectories towards and within Antwerp. The global dynamics of the genre are therefore tackled from a local perspective, an approach that has become a key research issue in the field of critical political economy (e.g. Murdock and Golding 2005). Inspired by this discipline, we place Hindi film in Antwerp in the context of its broader global background and compare it with the similar trajectories of Bollywood in other countries, principally the UK and the Netherlands (e.g. Dudrah 2002; Verstappen 2005). Although our focus lies on big screen developments, we also make some reference to the small screen manifestations of Hindi film: the DVD market, satellite television and the Internet. First, we describe the methods employed and the focus of the study; second, we discuss the position of this study within the existing research tradition on diaspora

and Bollywood; and finally, we present our empirical results before drawing a number of conclusions.

Methodology and focus

As indicated by Wasko (1999, 229), it is often difficult to obtain reliable data upon which to base critical arguments on the structural patterns and relations of cinema. Public documents such as multiplexes' annual reports provide little relevant or specific information, and frequently appear to be promotional rather than informative. Consequently, the results presented here are based largely on interviews conducted in the years 2009 and 2010 with 24 key figures from the distribution and exhibition markets and from the Indian communities.³ Additionally, we made use of archival data (from newspapers, magazines and websites as well as data obtained from distributors, multiplexes and relevant organisations). We also conducted exploratory participant observations by attending public screenings of Hindi films at the Metropolis multiplex and at festivals, alongside a survey we carried out at screenings of Bollywood films.⁴

The term 'Bollywood' is commonly used, especially in the distribution and exhibition businesses.⁵ For the purposes of this study, we focus specifically on commercial Hindi cinema from Bombay/Mumbai, since we encountered very few Indian films of other origin during more than two years of research in Antwerp. While non-Hindi popular Indian cinema has also met with success among Indian diasporas around the world (e.g. Tamil cinema, see Velayutham 2008), this is less the case in Antwerp. Additionally, Indian art house films originating from several areas of India tend to be restricted to the film festival circuit and to art house cinemas, and do not typically attract diasporic audiences. Although Bollywood films (old and recent) account for the majority of Indian films available, some DVD shops also stock a small selection of Tamil films, Pakistani dramas and religious series (both Hindu and

Muslim), supplemented sporadically by posters, audio CDs and fashion magazines. A percentage of the DVDs for sale in Antwerp are inevitably obtained through piracy, sold at extremely low prices and of varying quality (for more on Indian media piracy, see Athique 2008). Indian television channels generally gain access to broadcasting rights rather late and therefore tend to show older films.

While Bollywood films are watched by a variety of audiences in Antwerp, as mentioned above, it will become clear that they maintain a particularly strong structural link with the local Indian diaspora. Socially, Antwerp Indians tend to belong to one of two main communities: diamond traders (predominantly Jains from Gujarat), who began to come to Belgium in significant numbers during the 1970s, attracted by the local diamond market, and a smaller, floating group of contract workers active in the IT industry (predominantly Hindus), who have been arriving and departing intermittently since the 1990s. The presence of this second group of IT professionals in Antwerp is part of a more general trend of 'IT import', which also accounts for the expansion of South Asian communities in the USA (Kapur and Pendakur 2007, 51). In addition to these two main Indian groups in Antwerp are two smaller groups, consisting firstly of domestic staff working for the Indian diamond community, and secondly of small-business owners such as taxi services and grocery or telephone/internet shops. The diamond community, in particular, is a rather insular group, having little contact with the broader Antwerp environment except in business affairs. The movie theatre, however, is one of the few places besides DVD shops where Indian entertainment is publicly available in the city and thus provides a potential space for intercultural meetings.

Diaspora and Bollywood: different perspectives

In recent decades, the globalisation of media has received increasing scholarly attention

(e.g. Appadurai 1996; Morley and Robins 1995; Thussu 2006). In particular, the media use and media consumption by diasporic communities within Western contexts have attracted much interest for their roles in diasporic processes of integration, tolerance, belonging and cultural negotiation (e.g. Gillespie 1995; Karim 2003). The media of the country of origin and of the country of settlement hold central positions in social constellations and appear to have an influence on the changing identities within diasporic communities. The spaces in which media are consumed should also be borne in mind, however. Despite the prominence given to the issue of 'space' in diasporic discourse (e.g. Bhabha 1994), media and film cultures that are developed in public spaces have been marginalised somewhat by a strong focus in the literature on studies of the home as the media environment (e.g. Morley 2000). It is the public arena, however, that plays host to various dynamics of diversity and sociality that are fundamental to contexts of integration and multiculturalism (Georgiou 2006, 103–104). The movie theatre, for example, may be a space of tension between management policy and audience disposition and thus plays a role in broader questions of urban cultural diversity.

In their discussion of the global presence of Bollywood films⁶, Kaur and Sinha refer to 'Bollyworld', which indicates not only Bollywood films' 'inherently hybrid constituency' and their negotiation of 'both Indianness and its transformation, particularly when representing and being received by diasporic populations', but also their 'global distribution' (2005, 16). In this way, they highlight two crucial issues in the research on Hindi cinema's presence abroad. The first of these is concerned with audiences and texts, which are studied extensively, mainly from a cultural studies perspective (e.g. Banaji 2006; Dudrah 2006; Brosius and Yazgi 2007), whereas the second centres on global distribution and overlaps with the interests of political

economy. This latter discipline has a long tradition of international communication research that has emphasised power relations in the North-South divide (Thussu 2000, 53–81), flows and contra-flows (Kavoori 2006; Thussu 2006), Indian export policies, television networks and diasporic productions (Thussu 2008). Existing studies on distribution are already becoming outdated due to the rapid changes that have taken place in the industry in recent years (Pendakur and Subramanyam 1996) and have also tended to focus on global processes while neglecting the local political economic manifestations caused by the diasporic spread of Bollywood.

In this article, we tackle the local dynamics of Hindi film structures by carrying out a case study of Antwerp's Indian diasporic film culture, departing from a political economy perspective (e.g. Wasko 1999; Mosco 1996; Golding and Murdock 1997). In doing so, we do not seek to escape the preoccupation of cultural studies with audiences. Instead, we emphasise the complex entanglement of structures and audiences. The argument therefore makes reference to audiences but does so without adopting a reception study, which is something we have explored in more depth in our other publications (currently under review). Here, we propose a model of analysis centred around four overlapping elements: transformations through time, power relations, spaces and the audience.⁷ In this way, we attempt to bridge the gap between the local and global approaches and between their respective methodologies (Miller and Slater 2005; Murdock and Golding 2005).

Diasporic cinema structures from a historical perspective: transforming patterns of Hindi film in the city of Antwerp

“Grasping [...] histories and their structural and cultural legacies is an essential precondition for a full understanding of the dynamics of contemporary change and the new contradictions it is generating”, argues Murdock (2004, 27) in his critique of

postmodernity, digital media and globalisation studies. Critical political economy also subscribes to this opinion, and highlights processes, change and transformations in media phenomena (e.g. Wasko, 2004). In line with this approach, we begin our case study by examining how Bollywood first emerged in Antwerp.

Gemstone exclusivity: private screenings for the Indian diamond community

The first private screenings of Hindi films among overseas Indian communities occurred as early as the 1950s in the UK and the USA and were later organised in a similar fashion in Canada and in several European countries such as Germany. The venues for these events were often local cinemas or university halls, where 16 mm or 35 mm film reels were screened and ‘an exclusively *Indian* space, away from mainstream society’ was created (Punathambekar 2005, 154, emphasis in original). This kind of diasporic cinema culture came to an abrupt end in the early 1980s due to the advent of video, followed by satellite and cable television systems in the 1990s, all of which drew audiences away from theatres and into domestic viewing contexts.

Although Indians have been present in Antwerp since the 1970s, no theatrical film culture truly emerged until the 1990s when the community began to number approximately 1000. At that time in Europe (and especially in the UK), Indian films were again becoming available on the big screen, initially only in Asian-run theatres (which had also existed in the 1970s) and later also in multiplex cinemas. This renaissance was largely due to developments taking place in the Indian film industry: increasing export deregulation, for example, meant that diasporas were becoming potential audiences for Bollywood, and higher budgets were being made available for the production of spectacle films and films with typical diasporic themes (Dudrah 2002, 24–25; Thussu 2008). *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ, *The Brave Heart Will Take the Bride*) was the first film of this latter kind, in that it addressed the imagined

cosmopolitan experience of non-resident Indians (NRIs). This contrasted sharply with earlier films such as *Purab aur Pacchim (East and West)*, which depicted NRIs as overly westernised and therefore ‘degraded’ Indians. These dynamics would ultimately culminate in the recognition of the Indian film business as an industry in 1998 and in a breakthrough in distribution to the USA (Kapur and Pendakur 2007, 50).

In accordance with these global trends, private single screenings were set up among Antwerp Indians in 1995, and were subsequently repeated every three to four months (organiser of private screenings, personal communication). Antwerp therefore began to participate in Bollywood’s gradual spread only during this phase of the cinema’s revival, decades after other centres of more extensive Indian presence in the UK and the USA did. The screenings were organised by two diamond entrepreneurs from the Antwerp Indian community, on the basis of their exclusive personal connections with film distributor Yash Raj (organiser of private screenings, personal communication). In this way, they realised a kind of monopoly position for the supply of Bollywood films to Antwerp.⁸ Which films made it to the local screen depended on Yash Raj’s supply, beginning – interestingly – with the blockbuster *DDLJ*. Having come to an arrangement with Metropolis, the organisers sold tickets privately beforehand for numbered seats with prices that varied according to the seating in the theatre. The proceeds of the screenings went to support charities in both India and Belgium. The events remained exclusive affairs, as they were reserved for the elite community of diamond traders and their families and friends, who were informed personally via email and fax. In the Netherlands, similar screenings occurred late at night and were marred by violence and overcrowding, as repeatedly described by interviewees from the Netherlands (see also Verstappen 2005). Sales and screenings in Antwerp, on the other hand, were well organised. Kinepolis provided the venue, namely

the two-year-old Metropolis multiplex. The management allowed Hindi film screenings to be scheduled only at times when the theatre was virtually empty (usually on Sunday mornings), and in this way, a marginal space was allocated.

In sum, then, the first Hindi film screenings emerged as the revival of Indian film production coincided with the development of a local Antwerp multiplex culture, two issues closely linked to the worldwide theatrical renaissance. However, the private initiative appears to have fallen victim to its own success, since it inspired Kinopolis to copy the concept once new distributors began to target the Belgian market and offered the exhibitor the opportunity to create its own supply channels. This influx of new supply paths was the result of a late-1990s trend among major Indian film companies who opened overseas offices in order to manage distribution outside India more easily (Dudrah 2006, 152). As a result, the private programme was abandoned in 2007 shortly after the launch of regular Metropolis screenings (organiser of private screenings, personal communication).

The multiplex takes over: regular Bollywood programming and beyond

Following the private events of the Antwerp diamond traders, Hindi films were shown on Metropolis screens⁹ in the summer of 2006 and returned on a regular basis, with approximately 13 films being shown per year on average (2007–2010), and they are still being screened today.¹⁰ Single screenings were replaced by regular daily scheduling, often launched with fully booked premiere evenings (managers of Kinopolis and Metropolis, personal communication). For a multiplex, switching to its own supply of films not only offers advantages related to regularity and control, but also to commercialisation and expansion. By making the screenings available to more diverse audiences and by integrating them in the overall film programme, the exhibitor was able to establish a profitable commercial enterprise. Additional Hindi film screenings then

began to take place occasionally at the Kinepolis theatre in Brussels, Belgium's capital. Profits were further ensured by adding an intermission (made possible by the considerable length of most Hindi films), which encouraged the consumption of food and beverages. Kinepolis also developed its multicultural programming concept, launched in 2004 with Turkish films and similarly prompted by earlier private initiatives (Smets et al. 2011). This shift from private to public diasporic cinema structures can be seen as a reflection of large corporations' increasing domination and absorption of private initiatives and small-scale (in this case diasporic) ownership. Evidently, the transformations that emerged in the wake of these developments were not limited only to the exhibitional organisation mentioned above, but also took place within power structures and in terms of audience composition and management.

Pulling strings in distribution and exhibition: transformations in power

Power is an essential issue in political economy research and is commonly examined at a global level, for instance within multinationals and other transnationally oriented corporations. Elsewhere (Smets et al. 2012) we have opposed this trend by locating power found in diasporic film cultures at three different levels. First, at country-of-origin level, the existence and development of such cultures is partly determined by film production, as exemplified above by the changes running parallel to fluctuations in the Indian cinema industry.

Second, as Kraidy and Murphy have argued (2008, 351), power can also be manifested at local level, in our case study mainly in terms of exhibition. In Antwerp, the first impetus behind the availability of Bollywood films in all of the various exhibition contexts came from the local diasporic community itself. As described above, the (non-diasporic) multiplex began its screenings of Indian films after taking over the concept initiated by local Indian diamond dealers, though their cooperation was

ultimately rather short-lived (manager of Metropolis, personal communication). The Belgian-run Durga Antwerp Indian Film Festival began partly at the request of an Antwerp Indian lady who was friends with the organising committee (organising committee of Durga, personal communication). Both DVD retailers and shops selling groceries or telecom services which also offer DVDs are largely run by South Asian owners. Similarly, the hardware for satellite television and the adjustments needed in order to receive Indian channels are available through Indian, Pakistani and Moroccan dealers, alongside their Belgian counterparts. In this way, though not exclusively, the South Asian diaspora has been active in supplying itself with its own cinema. The distributors BEI and Eros, which are discussed in more detail below, are also run by diasporic Indians.

The third level of power we examine can be situated at the transnational level. While the impetus for the emergence of a diasporic film culture appears to rely on impulses from within the community in question, a trend exists in which bigger companies appropriate the market once potential is recognised. Among the distributors of Hindi films, vertically integrated and transnationally established corporations increasingly dominate at the expense of local initiatives and determine to a large extent the supply of films in peripheral markets such as Antwerp, which therefore become more restricted. With the launch of regular Bollywood screenings in Antwerp, Yash Raj's monopoly on supply was initially transferred to a Dutch distribution company, Bharat Entertainment International (BEI)¹¹. BEI distributed Bollywood films in the Netherlands for Pathé from its establishment in 2005 onwards and for Kinopolis (Antwerp and Brussels) in Belgium between 2006 and 2010 (representative of BEI, personal communication). In 2007, the UK branch of Indian company Eros Entertainment also appeared on the Antwerp scene, establishing a competitive arena.

Eros distributes films in 50 countries and has local branches in India, the UK, the Isle of Man, the USA, Dubai, Australia, Fiji and Singapore. The European market, which includes Belgium, is managed from the company's head office in London. In line with recent changes in the Indian industry (Ganti 2012), Eros's management is based on vertical integration: it is not only engaged in film (co-)production, but also distributes and exploits films in a range of formats including those for theatres, digital new media, home entertainment and television syndication (Eros International Plc 2009).

Furthermore, Eros has its own record label (Eros London sales manager, personal communication), which profits from the close ties between Indian cinema and the music industry. While DVD sales have yielded substantial profits overseas, for instance in the USA (Kapur and Pendakur 2007, 51), these channels have not been explored by theatrical distributors in Belgium. In contrast to the UK, where the market is characterised by a range of distributors (Thussu 2008, 104), the entire supply for Kinepolis in Antwerp is now restricted to the films offered by Eros. Antwerp Indian film distribution has thus become highly dependent on Eros, especially since BEI discontinued its activities. Nevertheless, other players appear reluctant to explore the market. Reliance Big Pictures, for example, has worked only once with Kinepolis. Antwerp's second multiplex, UGC, released *My name is Khan*, but did not promote it as a Bollywood movie. The distributor in this latter case was American company 20th Century Fox, in its first engagement with the Bollywood market in Belgium (representative of 20th Century Fox, personal communication). This approach is indicative of a general rapprochement between the two industries (Dudrah 2006; Ganti 2012).

The distributors' power is evident in the remarkable responsibility held with regard to the selection process used for Hindi films to be shown at Metropolis. This may

be due simply to a lack of sufficient expertise on the part of the exhibition company in assessing the potential of such films. The theatre management does occasionally reject films, though this is usually prompted by a surplus of overall film supply rather than by evaluative motives (e.g. dislike of a particular film). In fact, films are usually previewed neither by the distributor nor by Kinepolis management (manager of Kinepolis, personal communication). Quality control thus lies largely in the distributors' hands. Three main criteria are employed in order to decide on a film's eligibility for distribution. First, as in Hollywood, 'the importance of a star's earning capacity is recognised' (Kerrigan 2004, 34). This trend is confirmed by the Kinepolis box office results for Hindi films and by DVD sales in Antwerp. A second criterion relates to production companies and their allied directors. Finally, and most importantly, the film's music is assessed. Uniquely to Bollywood, music is considered a crucial indicator of a film's potential success – yet more crucial, indeed, than the actors playing the starring roles.

Positioning local film cultures in **public, urban and transnational spaces**

In her analysis of the relationship between diaspora, identity and the media, Georgiou (2006) proposes a spatial approach that emphasises domestic, public, urban and transnational spaces. Because of this study's focus on theatrical circulation, we begin with public spaces and omit the home. Broadly speaking, multiplexes dominate today's public cinema scene in Belgium. Of the multiplexes, Kinepolis enjoys a foremost position, followed by UGC. American productions are most prominent, while Flemish and other European films secure a smaller yet distinct position in theatrical programmes. American majors dominate at the distribution level, though independent Belgian distributors also have a small market share (Meers 2007). The multiplex – alongside DVD shops – also represents the public space of diasporic Indian film culture in Antwerp. Indian (and Turkish) films form part of a new culture of cinema developed

at the multiplex which typically attracts both mainstream and niche audiences, although these films appear on the Kinepolis schedule only 'because space allows' (manager of Metropolis, personal communication). As an exhibition space and a social space, the multiplex theatre is characterised by relationality, encompassing "heterogeneous interrelationships" (Allen 2006, 23) between structural and social phenomena. In the context of our case study, this means that Antwerp multiplex Metropolis enables the exhibition of Indian films and is also a potential meeting place for people from a variety of cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Antwerp's Hindi film screenings could therefore be seen as belonging to the moments of tension diasporic cultures can engender in the 'white' hegemonic discourse prevalent in Europe (Georgiou 2008).

As regards its urban meaning, the opening of the Metropolis multiplex indicated a major turning point in the history of cinema in Antwerp and in Flanders more generally, as the earlier film culture of small but numerous successful local neighborhood cinemas was transformed into a new cinema experience, technically superior and situated on the outskirts of the city (Meers 2007). Concerning the exhibition of Bollywood films, in particular, Metropolis maintains a monopoly position in Antwerp since the city's other multiplex, UGC (built as a cityplex in the centre and currently run by the French UGC Group), only shows Indian films sporadically (see above). Moreover, in Belgium as a whole, Antwerp is the only city besides Brussels (itself a distant second in terms of the number of releases shown) where Bollywood films are screened in theatres.

From a transnational perspective, distributors consider Antwerp (and Belgium in general) to be a non-traditional market (Pendakur and Subramanyam 1996, 74). Although the city has been included in the distributors' expansion, it is still seen as a peripheral market. During the selection procedure, only those films predicted to be

successful are ultimately chosen for Belgian screens, whereas in other countries, such as the UK (Eros) and the Netherlands (BEI), a more extensive supply is on offer. The same is true of DVDs and television. DVDs reach Antwerp shops through a variety of channels (mainly via the Netherlands) but those channels end in Antwerp. In other words, Antwerp shopkeepers do not sell the DVDs on to retailers in other countries. Considering this supply insufficient, Antwerp Indians also bring DVDs back from India or other countries such as Canada, where they travel on business, for example. This contrasts sharply with the complex network of incoming and outgoing DVDs in the UK and the Netherlands (Thussu 2008). Satellite television services also remain underdeveloped on the Belgian market. In fact, subscriptions to Indian channels have to be bought through family or friends living in the UK or directly from Sky, which supplies EU countries using pay-per-service cards. Antwerp also appears to be a peripheral market in terms of other Bollywood-related products, such as soundtracks. In the Netherlands, film songs are broadcast on local Hindustani (Suriname Indian) radio stations and circulate within the broader Hindustani music scene.¹² No such radio stations currently exist in Antwerp or in Belgium as a whole, though Indian film music is popular at private parties and at karaoke evenings.

Aside from Antwerp's position on the periphery, the local Indian film scene also suffers from a lack of diversification due to the increasingly global focus and rising dominance of large corporations. Eros provides only English subtitles for films shown in Antwerp in accordance with its global subtitling policy, in contrast with the location-specific Dutch subtitles provided earlier by BEI, thought to be too costly by Eros (Eros London sales manager, personal communication). In the past, BEI would also focus on local advertising by recruiting a specialised Antwerp company to distribute posters, flyers, banners and standees throughout the districts of Antwerp where NRIs were

working or living and occasionally also in shops where Bollywood DVDs were sold. Surprisingly, however, none of the Indian respondents we interviewed were familiar with the distributed flyers. In contrast, Eros sends the same types of promotional material directly to the theatres and approaches Antwerp simply as part of its global marketing system, controlled from the UK with no middlemen employed in Belgium. Indian overseas television channels serve as Eros's primary means of advertising. Other marketing strategies are also applied, such as online promotion, ringtones, press conferences, premieres and shows with the leading actors, especially in the UK, but their potential return in Belgium is thought to be too limited to be worth the investment (Eros London sales manager, personal communication). Since the closure of BEI, then, the promotion of Bollywood films has only been organised globally. In fact, this appears to be a successful strategy: the Antwerp Indians we interviewed were more familiar with global marketing tools than with their local counterparts, particularly when complemented by word-of-mouth advertising within the Indian community, as discussed below.

Managing diversified and changeable audiences

Following the introduction of a regular Bollywood programme in Metropolis, social structures within audiences were inevitably redrawn. Metropolis began to target a general audience rather than the previously narrow, specific target group, and this development resulted in more democratic audience composition. The survey we conducted at a number of Hindi film screenings in the theatre revealed that besides the majority of Indians¹³ represented, the screenings were also attended by Pakistani, Nepali, Tibetan (officially Indian or Chinese), Dutch-Surinami and very occasionally Dutch and Belgian audience members. As indicated by the quotation used at the

beginning of this paper, which assumes a growing interest in Indian film following the success of British film *Slumdog Millionaire*, the exhibitor is indeed attempting to attract more 'white' crossover audiences (manager of Metropolis, personal communication). The popularity of Bollywood among Turkish and Moroccan migrants, though often mentioned by interviewees, was seldom represented in theatrical consumption data. Among the Indian majority, the elite group of diamond dealers are now joined in the theatre by their own household staff, by IT professionals, grocery shop owners, taxi drivers and students, which is a clear indication of the major restructuring that audience composition has undergone in terms of class.

Nevertheless, this restructuring of audience composition is not expressed in the promotional strategies employed either by the exhibitor or by the distributors. Interestingly, both mainly run ethnic marketing campaigns (Marich 2005, 265–268), which is a typical instance of audience segmentation through media institutions. As a result, the distributors primarily target the South Asian diasporic communities in Antwerp: trailers (if available) are shown only before other Hindi films, thus targeting the corresponding audience exclusively; earlier flyers were distributed in carefully selected areas of Antwerp; and commercials are broadcast on Indian overseas television channels (representative of distribution company BEI (see *infra*); Eros London sales manager, personal communication). The same is true of exhibitor Metropolis, where in recent years a new type of segmentation based on 'ethnicity' has emerged via screenings of Turkish and Hindi films (Smets et al. 2011, Vandeveldt et al. 2011). According to Kinopolis and Metropolis management (personal communication), Indian audiences are popular with the theatre because of their substantial consumption at the concession stands. They are also known to make extensive use of the Kinopolis 100

Days Card, a good value bulk-buy formula in which ten tickets are sold together at a lower price than ten individual tickets and remain valid for 100 days.

All of the companies involved appear to consider additional film promotion unnecessary, relying instead on word-of-mouth advertising within the community. This kind of marketing is also known as buzz and entails products being recommended amongst consumers or audiences, in other words, promotion through social networks. While the obvious advantage of this type of publicity is that it is free, one associated drawback is the risk of the consequences of a film's not being well received. The Indian communities in Antwerp are closely knit, which is a positive environment for word-of-mouth advertising. Owners of Bollywood DVD shops, in particular, hold a crucial position in this respect as clients rely on them to gather information about theatre screenings. At the same time, the shop owners are – in film industry terms – ‘avids’: people with expertise whose opinion can become decisive in the success or failure of a particular film (Kerrigan 2004, 37). Although the distributors are well aware of this potential, they do not usually create buzzes intentionally (Salzman, Matathia, and O'Reilly 2003, viii). It is thought to be sufficient just to bring films to the attention of the right audience, an advertising strategy that is often underestimated (Kerrigan 2004, 37).

Despite Metropolis's (admittedly limited) efforts, ‘white’ audiences remain largely absent from commercial Hindi film screenings at the multiplex (see also Athique 2008). Instead, they attend screenings of Indian films in art house cinemas and previously constituted the majority of the audience at the Durga film festival, which was held yearly from 2007 until 2010 and was unique in Belgium for its exclusive focus on Indian film. Among Antwerp Indians, these alternative scenes have only been a moderate success. Durga's organising committee reported realising that Antwerp

Indians considered the festival's venue unsuitable for their needs as regards seat reservation and infrastructure, and also that they lacked interest in the films yet liked to participate (or have their children participate) in dance and other entertainment shows. Based on this experience, the committee began to provide adjusted activities for different audiences (Durga organising committee, personal communication). The 'performance' of Hindi films in theatre, dance, dress parties or karaoke is a widespread phenomenon not only in India, but also in Israel, the UK, Guyana and elsewhere (Gillespie 2002, 186).

Discussion

Our case study of Indian film culture in Antwerp presents the global tracks made by Hindi films as they enter European cities through various multi-level pathways. In the context of a global resurgence of cinema, with reverberations felt in both India and Belgium, Hindi films were introduced in Antwerp through private initiatives which in turn paved the way for public screenings at the multiplex. This development was part of a wider shift in power towards corporations and entailed changes in exhibition, private versus public ownership and control, spatial structures and audience management. Power shifts were most remarkable in the emerging market of distribution, which became gradually more dominated by vertically integrated companies. A reduce in structural diversity, for instance in subtitling or advertising, has been an inevitable effect of this dominance. Although Bollywood culture in Antwerp is increasingly determined by transnational players, and more recently by major Hollywood firms, the local Indian community has played a key role in its development via the now-abandoned private events and by means of the current word-of-mouth promotion of new releases. Bollywood in Antwerp constitutes an additional, peripheral market for the theatrical distributors (limited promotional strategies and supply compared to the UK),

the exhibitor (Bollywood as a supplement to the standard Hollywood supply, and audience segmentation), also in terms of Hindi DVDs and television. The city hosts neither the production nor transit of Hindi films and therefore functions as a kind of terminus for Bollywood. In this way, it can be compared with other European cities such as Frankfurt (Brosius 2005). In contrast, London as India's 'old imperial capital' has always occupied a key position in the distribution of Hindi films in Western countries (Thussu 2008, 102). The local exhibitor in Antwerp did extend and increasingly control Bollywood screenings, which expanded the previously exclusive audience of Indian diamond traders, but at the same time it has failed to attract a broader population.

Peripheral localities in continental Europe such as Antwerp have scarcely been examined in previous research, not only where Indian diasporic audiences are concerned but also with respect to Indian cinema flows. This appears to be part of a tendency to investigate political economy issues from a global rather than local perspective. This article attempts to demonstrate the rich data that a local study can generate, with results pertaining to local as well as global issues. Additionally, it reveals the complexity of the relationship between audience and structure in diasporic film cultures: different formats are consumed by different audiences; distributors and exhibitors consciously use marketing techniques based on (a lack of) knowledge of audience patterns; powerful figures are often part of the audience; and finally, the emergence of a diasporic film structure is highly dependent on the presence of a particular audience. The cinema structures available and their historical development in Antwerp have in some way shaped the local Indian film culture. Audience choices remain limited by the one distributor's restricted supply of films, which are almost always commercial, star-studded, big-budget pictures.

While this study has explored public screenings in some detail, other aspects of Hindi cinema – such as the available television, DVD and Internet supplies in Antwerp – have only been touched upon, and this is a limitation that future research could address. Our focus on the public space, however, is innovative, and has engendered a rich source of data which can be contextualised within issues of diversity and multiculturalism. Additionally, while our study is restricted to the Antwerp case, previous research on Bollywood and diasporas in other countries has allowed us to gain an overview of this study's position in the literature. Many aspects of the research, such as film selection, promotion and power relations, are relevant not only for Belgium but also for other European countries, especially those in which Eros operates. The results of our analysis can also be compared to other trends and flows described in political economy studies on European films or other non-Hollywood productions. Whereas most research on diasporic cinema cultures focuses on audience reception, we have shown that a structural analysis contributes to providing a more complete picture of diasporic cinema which ventures beyond the audience-structure dichotomy. In this way, we hope that the study goes some way towards addressing the lack of political economy studies on (Indian) diasporic film cultures.

Notes:

1. The company Kinepolis was established in 1998 and has 23 cinemas throughout Belgium, Switzerland, France, Poland and Spain (Kinepolis Group 2009b). Throughout this article Kinepolis refers to the company, whereas Metropolis refers to its local multiplex in Antwerp.
2. These numbers date from the beginning of 2012 and include naturalised migrants (Stad Antwerpen, Districts- en loketwerking 2007–2012, modifications by Stad Antwerpen, Studiedienst Stadsobservatie, email to researchers on April 16, 2012).
3. Specifically, one organiser of private screenings (May 11, 2009), the organising committee of the Durga Film Festival (March 11 and 15, 2009); in the exhibition sector, the management of Kinepolis (April 7, 2009), Metropolis (May 18, 2009), and UGC (May 4,

2010); in the distribution sector, a representative of BEI (April 29, 2009), a sales manager at Eros London (June 23, 2009) and a representative of 20th Century Fox (April 22, 2010). Furthermore, five experts on Indian cinema in general or on the Indian diaspora in Antwerp, two social workers active in the communities in question, one DVD shopkeeper, one satellite dish seller and eight members of the Indian diaspora in Antwerp with no particular link to the film industry.

4. In our survey, 255 questionnaires were collected at 14 different Bollywood screenings. This paper presents the results of the research project *Cinema and Diaspora. A comparative study into ethnic film cultures in Antwerp: Indian, Northern African, Turkish and Jewish cinema*, University of Antwerp/Ghent University, FWO-BOF UA, 2008–2013.
Supervisors: Philippe Meers, Roel Vande Winkel and Sofie Van Bauwel. Researchers: Kevin Smets and Iris Vandevælde.
5. Controversy surrounding the term ‘Bollywood’ has been addressed elsewhere. See for instance Ganti 2012, 12–15.
6. Studies on other globally oriented cinemas have also been conducted, for instance on New Zealand (Thornley 2009) and Turkish (Ewing 2008) diasporic film.
7. Although production is beyond the scope of this article, we wish to mention briefly Naficy’s work on film makers in diaspora (2001), a theme that is also found frequently in Bollywood research (e.g. Desai 2004).
8. Yash Raj is one of the two main Indian film production and distribution companies exporting films to Europe, the other being Eros Entertainment (for the UK, see Thussu 2008, 104).
9. UGC, Antwerp’s second multiplex theatre, has no specific ‘ethnic’ programme. According to the distributors this is due to communication difficulties with the French programming unit. The exhibitor, however, claims to have no interest in serving diasporic communities (UGC Antwerp theatre manager, personal communication).
10. This is low compared to the UK. In 2007, for example, more than 50 Indian films were released in British theatres (UK Film Council 2007) and in North-American theatres (Kapur and Pendakur 2007, 51) compared to the 18 films released in Belgium (representative of Kinepolis, email to researchers on September 2, 2009).
11. BEI was one of the operational distributors for Kinepolis at the time this research was being conducted, but the company went on to conclude its activities in 2010 (representative of BEI, personal communication).
12. The so-called Hindustanis living in the Netherlands are descendants of Indian indentured labourers in Suriname and their backgrounds therefore bear little resemblance to those of Indians living in Belgium.
13. In the survey, the term ‘Indian’ denotes a person either of Indian nationality or born in India or having one or more Indian (grand)parents.

References:

- Allen, Robert. 2006. The place of space in film historiography. *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 2: 15-27.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Athique, Adrian. 2008. The global dynamics of Indian media piracy: Export markets, playback media and the informal economy. *Media Culture & Society* 30, no. 5: 699–717.
- Banaji, Shakuntala. 2006. *Reading 'Bollywood': The young audience and Hindi films*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The location of culture*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Brosius, Christiane. 2005. The scattered homelands of the migrant: Bollyworld through the diasporic lens. In *Bollyworld: Popular Indian cinema through a transnational lens*, ed. R. Kaur and A.J. Sinha, 207–238. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Brosius, Christiane, and Nicolas Yazgi. 2007. 'Is there no place like home?': Contesting cinematographic constructions of Indian diasporic experiences. *Contributions to Indian sociology* 41, no. 3: 355–386.
- Desai, Jigna. 2004. *Beyond Bollywood: The cultural politics of South Asian diasporic film*. New York: Routledge.
- Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. Directed by Aditya Chopra. India: Yash Raj Films, 1995.
- Dudrah, Rajinder Kumar. 2002. Vilayati Bollywood: Popular Hindi cinema-going and diasporic South Asian identity in Birmingham (UK). *Javnost—the Public* 9, no. 1: 19–36.
- Dudrah, Rajinder K. 2006. *Bollywood: Sociology goes to the movies*. London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Eros International Plc. 2009. Annual Report and Accounts 2009. Eros International Plc. http://www.erosplc.com/EROS/media/Images/Pdf%20Files/2009/Annual_report_and_Accounts_2009.pdf?ext=.pdf.
- Ewing, Katherine P. 2008. Between cinema and social work: Diasporic Turkish women and the (dis)pleasures of hybridity. In *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. J.X. Inda and R. Rosaldo, 184–211. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

- Ganti, Tejaswini. 2012. *Producing Bollywood: Inside the contemporary Hindi film industry*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Georgiou, Myria, 2006. *Diaspora, identity and the media: Diasporic transnationalism and mediated spatialities*. Cresskill: Hampton Press.
- Georgiou, Myria. 2008. Shifting cultural landscapes, shifting boundaries: Diasporic media in Europe. In *Shifting Landscapes: Film and Media in European Context*, ed. M. Christensen and N. Erdoğan, 241–260. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Gillespie, Marie. 1995. *Television, ethnicity, and cultural change*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Gillespie, Marie. 2002. Dynamics of diasporas: South Asian media and transnational cultural politics. In *Global Encounters: Media and Cultural Transformation*, ed. G. Stald and T. Tufte, 173–193. Luton: University of Luton Press.
- Golding, Peter, and Graham Murdock, eds. 1997. *The political economy of the media*. 2 vols. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Kapur, Jyotsna, and Manjunath Pendakur. 2007. The strange disappearance of Bombay from its own cinema: A case of imperialism or globalization? *Democratic Communiqué* 21, no. 1: 43–59.
- Karim, Karim H., ed. 2003. *The media of diaspora*. London: Routledge.
- Kaur, Raminder, and Ajay J. Sinha, eds. 2005. *Bollywood: Popular Indian cinema through a transnational lens*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Kavoori, Anandam P. 2006. Thinking through contra-flows: Perspectives from post-colonial and transnational cultural studies. In *Media on the move: Global flow and contra-flow*, ed. D.K. Thussu, 49–64. Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge.
- Kavoori, Anandam P., and Aswin Punathambekar, eds. 2008. *Global Bollywood*. New York: New York University Press.
- Kerrigan, Finola. 2004. Marketing in the film industry. In *Arts Marketing*, ed. P. Fraser, F. Kerrigan and M. Özbilgin, 26–41. Boston: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Kinepolis Group. 2009a. About Kinepolis. http://corporate.kinepolis.com/index.cfm?Language_code=NED
- Kinepolis Group. 2009b. Ik ga op reis naar Kinepolis en ik neem mee... <http://www.kinepolis.com>

- Kraidy, Marwan M., and Patrick D. Murphy. 2008. Shifting Geertz. Toward a theory of translocalism in global communication studies. *Communication Theory*, 18, no. 3: 335-355.
- Marich, Robert. 2005. *Marketing to moviegoers: A handbook of strategies used by major studios and independents*. Boston: Focal Press.
- Meers, Philippe. 2007. Van de 'dood van de cinema' tot de megaplex en de thuisbioscoop (1980-). In *De verlichte stad. Een geschiedenis van bioscopen, filmvertoningen en filmcultuur in Vlaanderen*, ed. D. Biltereyst and P. Meers, 123–139. Leuven: Lannoo Campus.
- Miller, Daniel, and Don Slater. 2005. Comparative ethnography of new media. In *Mass media and society*, 4th ed., ed. J. Curran and M. Gurevitch, 303–319. London and New York: Hodder Arnold.
- Morley, David. 2000. *Home territories: Media, mobility and identity*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Morley, David, and Kevin Robins. 1995. *Spaces of identity. Global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries*. London: Routledge.
- Mosco, Vincent. 1996. *The political economy of communication. Rethinking and renewal*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Murdock, Graham. 2004. Past the posts – rethinking change, retrieving critique. *European Journal of Communication* 19, no. 1: 19–38.
- Murdock, Graham, and Peter Golding. 2005. Culture, communications and political economy, in *Mass Media and Society*, 4th ed., ed. J. Curran and M. Gurevitch, 60–83. London and New York: Hodder Arnold.
- My Name is Khan*. Directed by Karan Johar. India: Dharma Productions, Fox Searchlight Pictures, Fox Star Studios, Imagenation Abu Dhabi, Red Chillies Entertainment, 2010.
- Naficy, Hamid. 2001. *An accented cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pendakur, Manjunath, and Radha Subramanyam. 1996. Indian cinema beyond national borders. In *New Patterns in Global Television: Peripheral Vision*, ed. J. Sinclair, E. Jacka and S.C. Cunningham, 67–82. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Punathambekar, Aswin. 2005. Bollywood in the Indian-American diaspora: Mediating a transitive logic of cultural citizenship. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8, no. 2: 151–173.

- Purab aur Pacchim*. Directed by Manoj Kumar. India: V.I.P. Films, 1970.
- Salzman, Marian L., Ira Matathia, and Ann O'Reilly. 2003. *Buzz: Harness the power of influence and create demand*. Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley.
- Slumdog Millionaire*. Directed by Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan. UK: Celador Films, Film4, Pathé Pictures International, 2008.
- Smets Kevin, Philippe Meers, Roel Vande Winkel, and Sofie Van Bauwel. 2011. A semi-public diasporic space: Turkish film screenings in Belgium. *Communications: the European Journal of Communication Research: die Europäische Zeitschrift für Kommunikation* 36, no. 4: 395–414.
- Smets Kevin, Iris Vandeveldel, Philippe Meers, Roel Vande Winkel, and Sofie Van Bauwel. 2012. Diasporic film cultures from a multi-level perspective: Moroccan and Indian cinematic flows in and towards Antwerp (Belgium). *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. Published on 6 July, 2012 as doi: 10.1080/15295036.2012.672758
- Thornley, Davinia. 2009. Talking film, talking identity: New Zealand expatriates reflect on national film. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1: 99–117.
- Thussu, Daya Kishan. 2000. *International communication: Continuity and change*. London and New York: Hodder Arnold.
- Thussu, Daya Kishan. 2006. Mapping global media flow and contra-flow. In *Media on the move: Global flow and contra-flow*, ed. D.K. Thussu, 11–32. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Thussu, Daya Kishan. 2008. The globalization of “Bollywood” – the hype and hope. In *Global Bollywood*, ed. A.P. Kavoori and A. Punathambekar, 97–113. New York: New York University Press.
- UK Film Council. 2007 UK Genre List. http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/excel/b/i/UK_2007_genre_list.xls
- Vandeveldel Iris, Kevin Smets, Philippe Meers, Roel Vande Winkel, and Sofie Van Bauwel Sofie. 2011. Bollywood and Turkish films in Antwerp (Belgium): two case studies on diasporic distribution and exhibition. *Javnost – The Public* 18, no. 3: 55–70.
- Velayutham, Selvaraj. 2008. The diaspora and the global circulation of Tamil cinema. In *Tamil cinema: The cultural politics of India's other film industry*, ed. S. Velayutham, 172–188. New York: Routledge.

- Verstappen, Sanderien. 2005. *Jong in Dollywood: Hindostaanse jongeren en Indiase films*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.
- Wasko, Janet. 1999. The political economy of film. In *A Companion to Film Theory*, ed. T. Miller and R. Stam, 221–233. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Wasko, Janet. 2004. The political economy of communications. In *The Sage Handbook of Media Studies*, ed. J. Downing, 309–330. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.